

~~TOP SECRET~~

16 January 1959

Briefing on Soviet Military Capabilities and Programs

Conclusion

There has been much specific, detailed information in this briefing -- this is consistent with my practise of providing as full and factual an account as possible. But ^{we} must not lose sight of some of the implications of Soviet military power over the coming year ^s and the direction of their policy. Therefore, I want to conclude with some rather more subjective statements about the general nature of the threat.

In their military, scientific, and other programs, the Soviets are animated by a spirit of intense competition with the West, and particularly with the US. The intensity of their efforts is not likely to diminish even though they already consider that their military situation vis-a-vis the US has considerably improved.

Their doctrine, tradition, and continuing suspicion of us will require that at a minimum they maintain large forces capable

~~TOP SECRET~~

~~TOP SECRET~~

of meeting a wide variety of contingencies, up to and including general war.

Their aspiration to national power, their ^{desire} ~~need~~ to back up an aggressive foreign policy, and their desire to build morale within the Bloc will lead them to seek visible superiority over the US in technology and weapon systems.

While Soviet security policies will continue to make it difficult to pinpoint in advance the exact nature of their technological advances, we think the following general trends can be identified with some confidence:

1. The Soviets will press with great vigor their research and development in advanced weapon systems.
2. They will rely increasingly on missiles for both offensive weapon delivery and air defense.
3. They already have operational capabilities with ballistic missiles of up to 1,100 nautical miles range, their ICBM capability is emerging, and they will build up a substantial ICBM capability as rapidly as they can.

~~TOP SECRET~~

4. They will strive for increasingly dramatic accomplishments in space, so as repeatedly to demonstrate leadership in this field.

5. Their capabilities for long range and inter-continental nuclear attack, especially with missiles, will increase markedly over the next few years.

6. The capabilities of their air defense weapons, warning, and control systems will also increase, although it will probably be several years before they can have an operational system with any effectiveness against ballistic missiles.

7. Their submarine force will continue to pose a grave threat to Allied naval forces and merchant shipping, and its ability to contribute to missile attacks on land targets will grow.

8. They will at all times maintain substantial forces-in-being, including conventional forces, capable of mounting large-scale operations across Bloc borders on several fronts simultaneously.

9. At the same time, they will continue to seek every means to make US overseas bases untenable and to inhibit our use of nuclear weapons.

This projection, does not, in my view, mean the Soviet leaders are planning for war -- on the contrary, I believe that while they regard the final victory of Communism as inevitable, they view it as to be achieved mainly through political forms of struggle. Assuming that we maintain and further strengthen our own deterrent capabilities, I believe that over the next few years they will continue to estimate that the scale of damage they would suffer in a general nuclear war would threaten the survival of their regime and society. But I foresee continued danger that such a war may nevertheless occur, primarily because of the possibility of Soviet miscalculation in a crisis or an uncontrollably expanding local conflict. This danger may be increasing as Soviet policy is becoming more assertive.

Khrushchev says "We will bury you." This type of statement is referring, not primarily to war, but to his intention to turn

~~TOP SECRET~~

whatever degree of military superiority he can achieve to advantage in the non-military arena. He says "Let's have a competition." The record of Soviet actions is a clear warning that the Soviet offensive on all fronts -- diplomatic, economic, military, scientific, and others -- aims irretrievably to capture world leadership from the US. This is the challenge Khrushchev has thrown down.

~~TOP SECRET~~